

Poems

Alice Tarbuck

Fin Whale

i. The Cambridge Zoological Museum

Whale-watched, we waited
he Pevensey-stranded, flensed,
rafter-rearticulate, a care
taken in the aerial balance of bones.
As if the buildings were Bering Strait,
the air a total depth of 470m,
asphalt a fat herring shimmer,
a vast black cloud of krill.

Enlivened, pale bone cathedral,
our truest placid ghost. Drunk
on the space inside, taking dates
to the body-chapel, kiss,
as if stepping on the finest sand,
held under the concrete slam
of ocean. Here is material reality,
scale-skewing. One whale a touch,
a pod a story, then the whole network
from teeth to baleen, from my throat humming
to the hum-pop of their deep sea.

ii. Mythos

The Fin Whale is a vessel, a hunting
history, a haunted sea-sounder,
a deep joy, metres stretching,
– stitch – breach – feed –
wearer of a crooked mask,
unmeasurable save by the paltry
metrics we use. Exempt,
outside, beyond.
(Except)

In January 2011, a 16.7 m (55 ft) emaciated adult male fin whale stranded dead on the Tyrrhenian coastline of Italy was found to be [...] carrying heavy loads of organochlorine pollutants.

iii. Use-case

A flurry of men describe fin-whales
the world still unpinned,

ripe for a certain sort
of classification for re-
structuring for pro-
fessing for pro-
fitting for pro-
nouncing all mysteries
by their worth:
*the fin-back whale is distinguishable from the right-whale
much swifter
very furious when struck
and held with great difficulty*

(starburst flesh-rent through harpoon arc
full peeled petals red sea red-brown ship
asymmetric: heat-salt water-blood
whale)

*their oil is not near so much as that of the right-whale
and the bone of little profit, being short and knobby*
(women live inside dead whales,
pinned thinner than rounded bones, breathing oh-oh-oh
breathing the un-blasted spume smelling the sea at dressing
feeling the depths in their lung-shallows, throats of krill columns of
cold water/ low song/ columns of krill)
The belly of the whale is white.
The man moves on.

*the greyhound of the sea ...
for its beautiful, slender body is built like a racing yacht
the speed of the fastest ocean steamship.*
engine comparisons, elegance of men's hands
water-rippers, signal-jammers, wave flattened to highway
calling in diesel-tongue,
there is a whole chasm, clanging metallic
between the final dorsal blinking down
and the throat-roar of an engine's churn.

iv. Sunk/swallow

They will whale
until the last whale
the last whale they will leave, singing,
they will play it over speakers
whilst they eat dinner
congratulate themselves
on conservation efforts.

Do you wonder what it tastes like?
hummm-hummmm- mpop
Do you wonder if it leaves a film of fat across your lips?
hummm-hummmm- mpop
You can put your fork in
but tines enter one way, and twist,
arc-harpooning on porcelain,
tide-gulped, swell-swallowed
stomach as an afterword,
your soft
fat holding *heavy loads of organochlorine pollutants.*

The first time I ate polystyrene

there is something absurd and moving - Anne Laure

that anthropocene snack
beach-popcorn, the warm hiss,
protector of white goods. I bit
the coffee cup because I thought your brakes
were softer than reality. Lenticular clouds
deserve a photograph, as white and strange as
cheap-hot-gas-stop-tea. You say the lens
can't make it look the way we see it I think
the cups should not take teeth marks so well
like Neolithic pottery, decorated by half-moons
of intent. It will striate into earth for just as long or longer
so it might as well be pretty. They will say, look at the greed,
if there are any left to say, look at the waste.
Your face with that cloud, though. That was like
leaving toothmarks of desire in the sky. In the small
days, why not kiss? It is the same as bitten things,
and lets me see you with my little teeth.